

Travel & Tourism:

How to Build a Digital Experience for 2020 and Beyond



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In 2020, travel ground to a halt forcing consumers to reprioritize. As travel begins to ramp back up, they are seeking meaningful experiences — and this often begins with a visit to a travel company's website or application. In this guide, we'll explore the key steps you can take to optimize the digital experience for safety conscious travellers.



The travel and tourism industry is one of heavy competition and thin margins. As uncertain times gripped the world these margins became even thinner. Companies seeking to elevate themselves above the noise need to focus on the key factors that appeal the most to consumers; speed and convenience. Nowadays, consumers want a quick, seamless and enjoyable experience as they book and arrange their travel plans. Anything less simply won't do.

As conditions begin to slowly recover around the globe, brands will find that travellers are focusing on those businesses that can provide both value and awareness to their desire for new experiences.

However, the overall process of booking an entire trip can be a long one.

According to a [McKinsey report](#), booking an entire trip can encompass 100 digital touchpoints. Simply booking a hotel may include around 45 touchpoints and the overall process? Well, on average it can take 36 days.

Not to mention the fact that travellers are now much more selective when choosing destinations since they have to take more safety precautions and restrictions into account.

Given the number of touchpoints and the average time it takes to complete the travel-purchase journey, some brands are at a loss as to how to meet the demands of speed and convenience that their consumers so desperately crave.

In this whitepaper, we'll take a look at how travel brands can improve the overall traveller buying experience by making it leaner and more personalized. We'll also take a look at the technologies needed to help drive this improved customer experience.

Making a Traveller's Digital Experience Lean, Personalized, and Fun

Travel around the world ground to a complete halt for a few months, lowering the excitement surrounding the industry in previous years. With restrictions and regulations still prevalent and expected to continue in several countries, the landscape has changed. People venturing out over the next few months can expect to be greeted by fewer crowds, temperature checks, masks and social distancing guidelines.

The focus of modern explorers and holidaymakers will be on experiences, not just destinations. That means brands must make their digital experiences before, during, and after each trip, just as memorable as the trip itself. Here are some ways they can do exactly that.



Keep the Content Coming

Brands need to focus on building awareness about their products and delivering relevant information to their audiences.

As restrictions are lifted, travellers will want more information about the experiences they had missed out on when forced to shelter in place, as well as up to date news and guidelines about potential destinations.

The companies that can satisfy this need by providing stories about destinations reopening, exciting attractions that people are still eager to see and more will be the ones to benefit the most.

We've seen content marketing work well for travel brands using [Magnolia CMS](#), and indeed, content marketing is widely hailed as the most successful form of digital marketing. However, a haphazard approach to content marketing will result in sunk costs and wasted time rather than ROI. The first step to creating a successful content marketing strategy is to ensure that there is proper infrastructure in place.

Firstly, you'll need to ensure your content targets the right customers. For that, data-based buyer personas and customer journeys are necessary.

Let's begin with the buyer personas. For travel companies, some of the details included in a buyer persona will include both demographic and psychographic data such as age, job position, business traveller, leisure traveller, and travel frequency.

Learn More: [Data-driven Buyer Personas](#)

Once you have a number of buyer personas to cover the bulk of your target market, it's time to map out the most common customer journeys that your customers go through. This should include the various touchpoints that buyers go through before booking a trip or renting a car. For example, your data might show that the most common journey includes your website, your helpline, your destination guides, your mobile app, and then back to your website to complete the purchase.

Brands need to ensure that they have identified not only the correct personas for their target audience, but also that they have the right

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personnel in place to produce a continuous stream of content that is relevant to that each persona at every stage of their buying journey.

Learn More: [Mapping Customer Journeys](#)

Unify Your Message

Identifying the right buyer personas and segmenting them accordingly is only the start of the process. Next, travel brands will need to decide what they will do with all of the content they have at their disposal. While having a content mix including social media posts, blog content, podcasts, videos and paid ads is important to target buyers across multiple channels and at different touchpoints, it is probably even more so important to target them at the right touchpoint, at the right time.

Timing is everything when it comes to segmentation as buyers at different points in the customer journey will need different types of content tailored specifically for them. Every visitor should not see the same website in the same exact way.

Also, the messaging coming from the brand across different channels should be unified. While different platforms will need pieces of content that are natively tailored to that platform, buyers should not feel like they are viewing a competitor when they see a similar message from the same company on a different platform.

Fuel Your Campaigns with Content

To encourage social distancing, many companies chose to focus on virtual meetings, events and webinars. This helped to maintain a community presence while maintaining safety protocols.

Recent events have reiterated the importance of a digital transformation. For brands that were already well-positioned digitally then making a pivot to new options wasn't a problem for them. Brands that once relied on large crowds as part of their product offerings will want to consider these digital options as they look forward.

Initially, you'll want to ensure that the basics are being done correctly. For your brand, those basics may include a regularly updated blog focused on trending locations, updated travel guides, and protocols and hotel reviews including an in-depth look at their cleaning procedures.

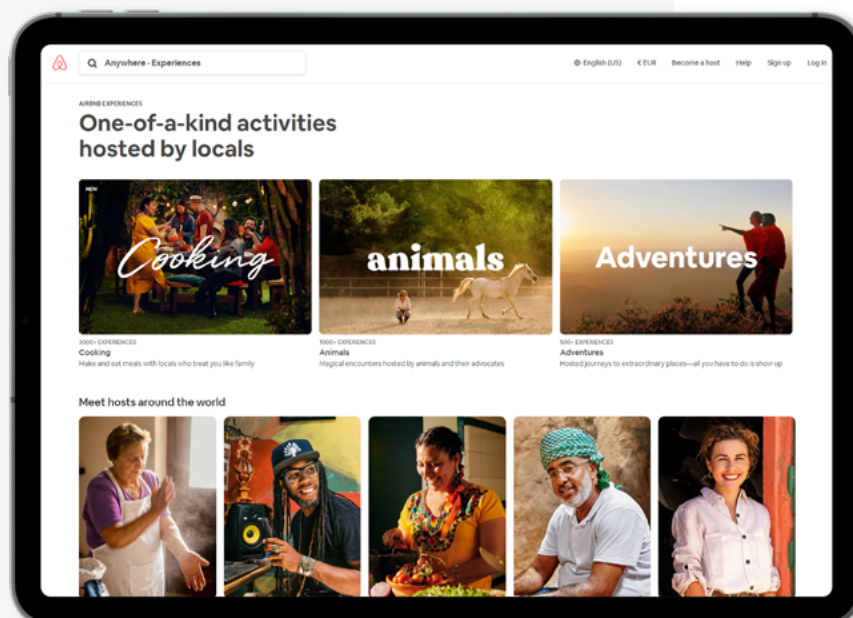
Once you're happy with the basics of your content marketing, it's time to think bigger. The modern travel experience encompasses not only the destination but also the activities available once travellers have arrived. With all these possibilities, travel brands have an abundance of ways to create content at scale, and personalize the overall experience for their customers.

Example to Follow: [Airbnb Experiences](#)

While Airbnb is known across the travel industry as an alternative to hotels, it has improved the overall traveller experience by incorporating Airbnb experiences. Through partnerships with locals, travellers are able to not only stay in an apartment or home and live like a local, but they can also have more authentic adventures as well. Airbnb experiences have also given the company more opportunities to create content around each activity.

Airbnb experiences are built seamlessly into the overall platform. Once a traveller has secured their accommodation purchase it is easy for them to receive suggestions about where to go and what to see in the area during their visit. Airbnb promotes experiences through various forms of content, including partnerships with the very influencers that inspire travellers. They understand how their intended audience thinks and use the right messaging to attract them to their product offerings.

To cope with rules regarding social distancing and in keeping with office meetings and events going virtual, Airbnb introduced online experiences. Rather than having to leave their homes, individuals can join hosts providing experiences and educational tours from anywhere in the world.



Deliver Hyper-personalized Experiences

Thanks to the advancements in artificial intelligence, voice assistants and website personalization engines, consumers are already getting most of their digital lives personalized. The likes of Google and Amazon have raised the bar, and travel companies—like all other companies—now need to work harder to keep up with the pace.

A [personalized web experience](#) has been proven to reduce bounce rates and increase conversions. Yet, [research shows](#) that basic personalization fails to impress the modern consumer. For instance, just 8% of survey respondents said they would be encouraged to engage with a retail brand if they addressed them by their first name. A mere 7% said they'd engage with a birthday email.

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So, how can travel brands get deeper with their personalization?

Personalization is all about the data brands have at their disposal. This includes both explicit data gained from the user and implicit data that was derived from other interactions.

The opportunity for travel brands to provide a personalized experience for their customers can be found in the booking process as well as in marketing and customer service. Potential travellers begin to search for hotels, car rentals and more long before they begin to travel. As a result, their search data gets stored even if they don't complete a transaction. Through personalized experiences and the right targeting, brands can provide more information to help consumers choose what to do next.

Through the use of historical data, previous searches and more, consumers actually expect brands to make various recommendations to them. At certain points, it can seem like an invasion of privacy to be bombarded with suggestions soon after performing a search, but it is possible to provide a personalized approach in the right way. Customers actually enjoy being offered personalized experiences that are relevant.

Personalization is one of the pillars of the new age of marketing in 2020 and brands that do not invest in it will risk losing market share from not only their competitors but from global giants like Amazon, Google and Facebook.

To be effective at personalization, especially the [hyper-personalization](#) that consumers crave, brands need to be active listeners. They need to be able to address intent across touchpoints in real-time.

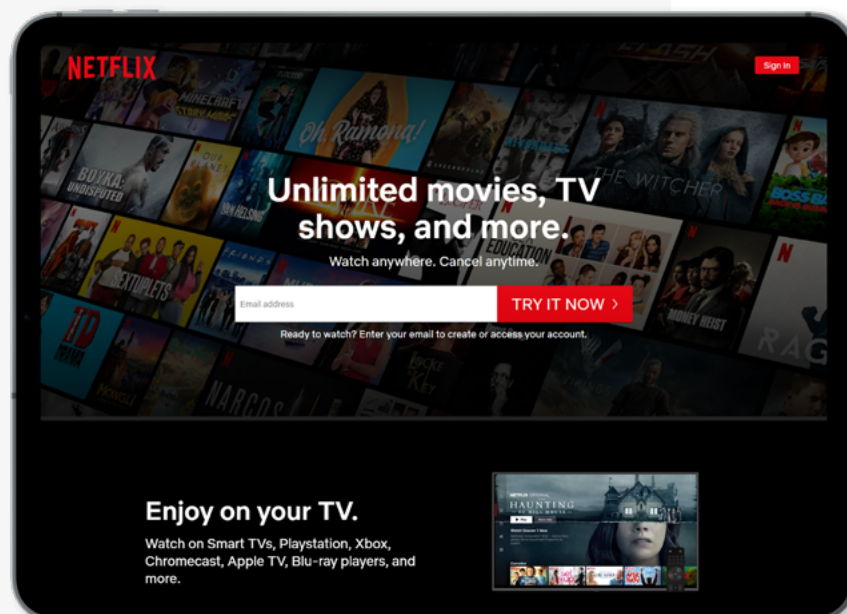
With new guidelines on safety, travel and more being issued almost daily, brands need to listen even more intently than they would have before so that can personalize content even more for their audience.

To do this, brands need to utilize a powerful digital experience platform to effectively leverage customer data. Being able to build personas and deliver the right content at the right time is essential for building customer relationships and creating an overall great customer experience. Also, it makes it easier for marketers and content authors to create the most appropriate pieces of content at scale to target different segments.

Example to Follow: [Netflix](#)

When it comes to personalization, there is probably no better example than Netflix. The streaming service provides recommendations for what movies or TV shows to watch based on the content a user has already consumed. Trending Now, Popular on Netflix and other categories are comprised of not only of the data mined from millions of users profiles, but it is matched to data from your own profile to provide the most personalized experience.

Title recommendations, actors or actresses you might like and more. Netflix treats data like gold and in doing so are able to lead the way when it comes to hyper-personalization.



Learn More: [Next Level Personalization](#)

Seamlessly Connect Every Channel & Touchpoint

It can take several touchpoints to engage a customer. Now, more than ever it's important for brands and marketing teams to be able to connect multiple channels on the buyer's journey. However, traditionally this has been a challenge as over [90% of marketers struggle to seamlessly connect more than three channels on the buyer's journey.](#)

This presents a huge problem, but also a huge opportunity for those brands that utilize the right pieces of technology. The 100 touchpoints that the average consumer goes through when booking a trip can cause extended time and lots of friction. To fix this, brands can make use of an omnichannel strategy. This reduces the friction throughout the overall experience and makes things faster, smoother and overall more convenient for the consumer.

Omnichannel marketing is a multichannel strategy used across organizations. However, it can't be a randomized approach using different channels. The types of channels and tactics matter. With laptops, mobile phones, tablets and other pieces of technology, users switch between devices several times in the same day. However, [90% of customers expect that their interactions with a brand will be consistent across all channels and this requires a seamless online experience.](#)

For consumers, the benefits of an [omnichannel strategy](#) is a more integrated and seamless experience. On the other hand, travel brands can benefit from more conversions and an integrated view of their customers. A great omnichannel experience may include the ability for a customer to start a purchase on their phone and then return to it on a desktop at a later time. For travellers researching hotels and accommodation before they return home to pay with their card this can be very convenient.

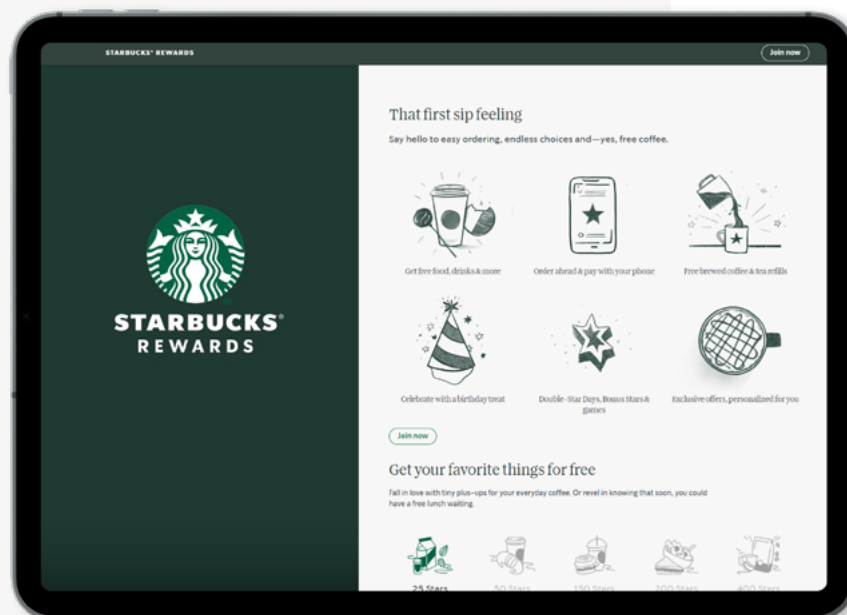
Seamlessly connecting every channel and touchpoints requires the use of a capable CMS that is optimized to be able to handle the necessary integrations for a traveller's digital experience.

For travel companies promoting various travel destinations via social media or blog posts, allowing their consumers to be able to faultlessly transition to a platform such as Kayak or Skyscanner to continue the process is enormous. The decision to go omnichannel should be a corporate level decision as it requires integration across many departments to be effective.

Example to Follow: [Starbucks](#)

Starbucks provides a great omnichannel experience through their rewards program. Customers receive a free rewards card from the store and are able to use it whenever they make a purchase. Unlike other rewards programs, it isn't only limited to the card and in-store purchases.

Instead, customers can create an online profile that is recognized on the Starbucks website, app, via phone and in-store. Changes on the profile get updated across all channels meaning that a customer can reload their balance while standing in line waiting for their next cup of coffee or croissant.



Learn More: [Buzzword Bingo: the real deal behind omnichannel, personalization and headless](#)

Enable Self-service

Customer experience is one of the leading indicators of marketing success. Many customers will actually choose to leave a brand if they feel underappreciated, or if they feel like things are not convenient from them. This is what spawned a mobile-first initiative as [over 50% of customers are likely to leave a brand's website if it isn't mobile-friendly](#). A growing percentage of the traffic on the web today comes from mobile devices and part of enabling a self-service experience for customers includes having a mobile-friendly experience. The switch to mobile for many consumers is also behind the rise in [progressive web applications](#). PWAs provide an opportunity for brands to have a seamless digital experience that enables self-service.

“With a self-service website and application, your digital presence is no longer a brochure, it’s a holiday booking portal.”

While having engaged and friendly customer service representatives is important in every company, travel brands need to understand that in a 2020 landscape, the majority of customers, in fact, prefer self-service. Rather than having to speak to a company representative to solve a particular problem, it can be easier for a consumer to handle things themselves using the website or application they are already on. They may prefer to utilize a knowledge base or some other form of self-reliant feature to get the job done quickly.

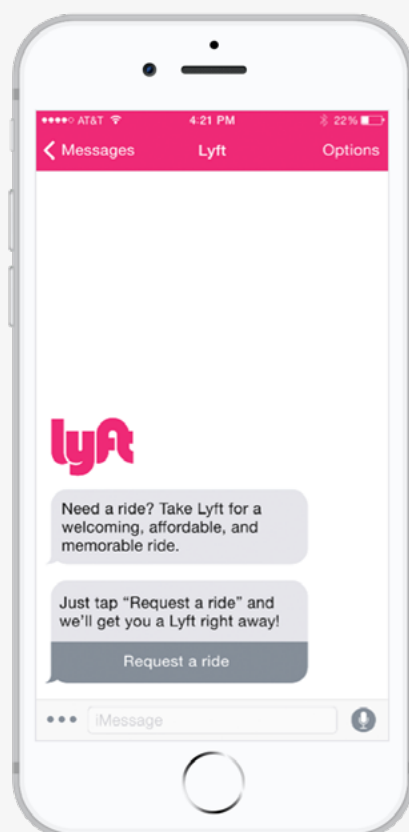
On top of an improved digital experience, self-service enabled websites and mobile applications mean that travel brands no longer need to heavily rely on company sales reps to push numbers in a positive direction. It provides brands with the capacity to scale faster, with fewer costs. With a self-service website and application, your digital presence is no longer a brochure, it’s a holiday booking portal. That means you’re truly positioned to scale and increase bookings without convincing consumers to call or visit your brick-and-mortar location. Couple this with an engaged content strategy and omnichannel approach and it is a recipe for creating an aligned digital experience for your intended audience.

The appeal of enabling self-service has seen many companies capitalize on growing trends including chatbots and artificial intelligence. With an entire travel portal at their fingertips, consumers are hesitant to remove themselves from a website or app to then call a customer service rep to solve a problem. Instead, on-screen chatbots and artificial intelligence generated suggestions can provide them with everything they need in order to solve their problems.

Example to Follow: [Lyft](#)

Ride-sharing company Lyft is successfully integrating chatbots, artificial intelligence and voice capabilities to their overall experience. Users don't need to go to the Lyft app to request a ride. Instead, they can do so via chat on Facebook Messenger or using Amazon Echo for voice search. Just as it does in the app, the Messenger bot updates with key details such as the driver's location, picture, car model and license plate.

As more customers seek out frictionless experiences and embrace even more contactless payment methods, having technology like AI in place will help to make the process much easier.



Pivot from Print to Digital

Printed assets still have a place, but there's a dire need to digitize assets, photography and content. This is where [Digital Asset Management](#) (DAM) comes into play. A DAM allows brands to keep up with the pace of the internet and spread consistent messages across various channels. A strong DAM—which today can be found baked into a strong CMS or digital experience platform—can organize and automatically tag imagery to make it easier for content authors to leverage relevant images and captions for different locations, hotels, rental cars, etc.

Employees without a Digital Asset Management system [spend 5x longer looking for assets](#), which inevitably slows down marketing campaigns and internal decisions. Not to mention, sluggish asset management reduces the time marketers have to get the right content to the right customer at the right time. A robust CMS allows them to store all digital assets in one centralized location. Marketers for travel brands can view, edit, manage and use their digital assets in content more easily.



Travel has long evolved from going to a travel agent's office filled with brochures of various destinations around the world and then deciding where to go. In this digital landscape, customers search for everything online yet some travel brands are still lagging behind. Digital transformation is essential for those that wish to survive.

Example to Follow: [New York Times](#)

Every industry has been adjusting to going digital in recent times but one industry that was previously rocked by digital is the media industry. Newspapers and publishing companies, in particular, were the hardest hit as consumers stopped purchasing newspapers, in favor of getting their news from various sources online.

The successful newspapers that have managed to survive like the New York Times have done so by adapting to the changing habits of their consumers. They provide daily news via social media channels and RSS Feeds with a subscription model for their main newspaper instead of ads. To effectively process images and content across so many channels requires a strong CMS.



Embrace the Cloud

The majority of travel research today is being done online. As such, many marketers are embracing emerging technologies. Today, that includes things like chatbots, artificial intelligence and voice-search capabilities. Over the next 5 years, marketers feel the following technologies are most [likely to disrupt travel marketing](#): augmented reality or VR (20%), real-time travel audience data (17%), and smart speakers or voice search (13%).

This growing trend of emerging technologies means that brands will need the services of a [headless CMS](#) to properly support their needs. A headless CMS provides the infrastructure necessary for brands to embrace emerging technologies and achieve exactly what they need to get the right content in front of their customers. This improves the overall content strategy that travel brands need to differentiate themselves from competitors. Content creation and repurposing is essential but can reduce time to market in many cases. Embracing a headless CMS allows brands to create content and repurpose it across multiple channels seamlessly, providing their customers with an omnichannel experience.

In fact, brands need to be embracing cloud technology as well since supporting AR, VR, and voice-enabled experiences are almost impossible without being cloud-based to begin with.

The [Magnolia Cloud platform as a service \(PaaS\)](#) provides various advantages as a cloud-based platform when compared to on-prem solutions travel brands may currently be utilizing. These advantages are especially relevant when it comes to DevOps and scalability. The cloud platform contains the Magnolia CMS, managed services for enterprise-grade security at peak performance and a complete application development environment running on AWS.

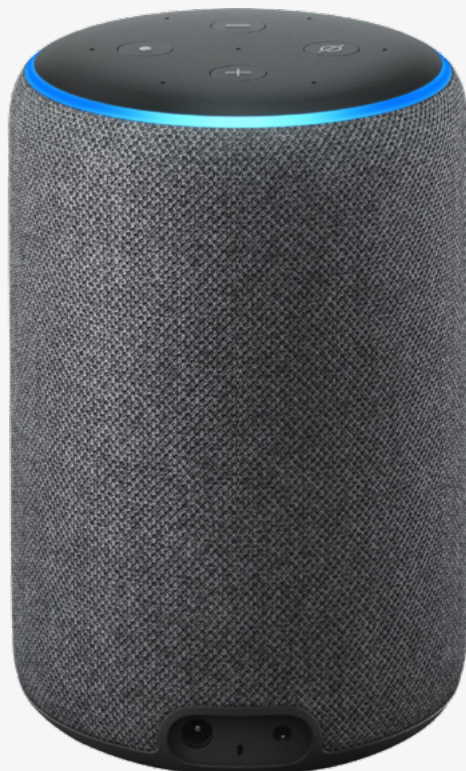
Magnolia Cloud includes: the Magnolia CMS software, a complete application development environment running on AWS, and managed services for enterprise-grade security at peak performance.

Magnolia provides content management features and several integrations, onboarding & self-service as well as application management and scaling strategies. The journey to a complete digital experience for travel brands in 2020 and beyond begins with embracing the cloud and a headless CMS to manage all of their content.

Example to Follow: [Amazon Echo](#)

Amazon seems to be working towards relevance across several industries and has the capability to have a huge impact on the travel industry thanks to their IoT devices. In 2018, Amazon [launched its Alexa for Hospitality program](#) and placed Echo devices in hotel rooms across the country starting with those owned by Marriott. The goal was to enhance the hotel guests' experience through the power of voice commands.

Guests are able to ask questions about the hotel, call for room service, book spa appointments as well as other things they might typically use Alexa for at home like playing games or audiobooks. As hotels reduce contact with guests to maintain social distancing guidelines and prevent overcrowding, these supporting technologies will become even more important.



Learn More: [Magnolia Cloud](#)

Travel & Tourism Leaders Create Compelling Experiences with Magnolia

Travel companies hoping to exceed expectations of their customers need to be able to deliver a complete digital experience in 2020. It requires them to be able to utilize strong content marketing practices with a unified message across all channels.

Customers also crave a hyper-personalized approach that is tailored directly to them and their needs. They want to receive the right messaging and offers at the right time depending on where they are in the customer journey. They also want to be able to have seamless transitions across different channels and be able to self-service themselves as they see fit. The way to do this involves embracing the cloud and an integrated CMS system. Spanish hotel company Melia did just that with Magnolia.



Melia Beyond Cloud

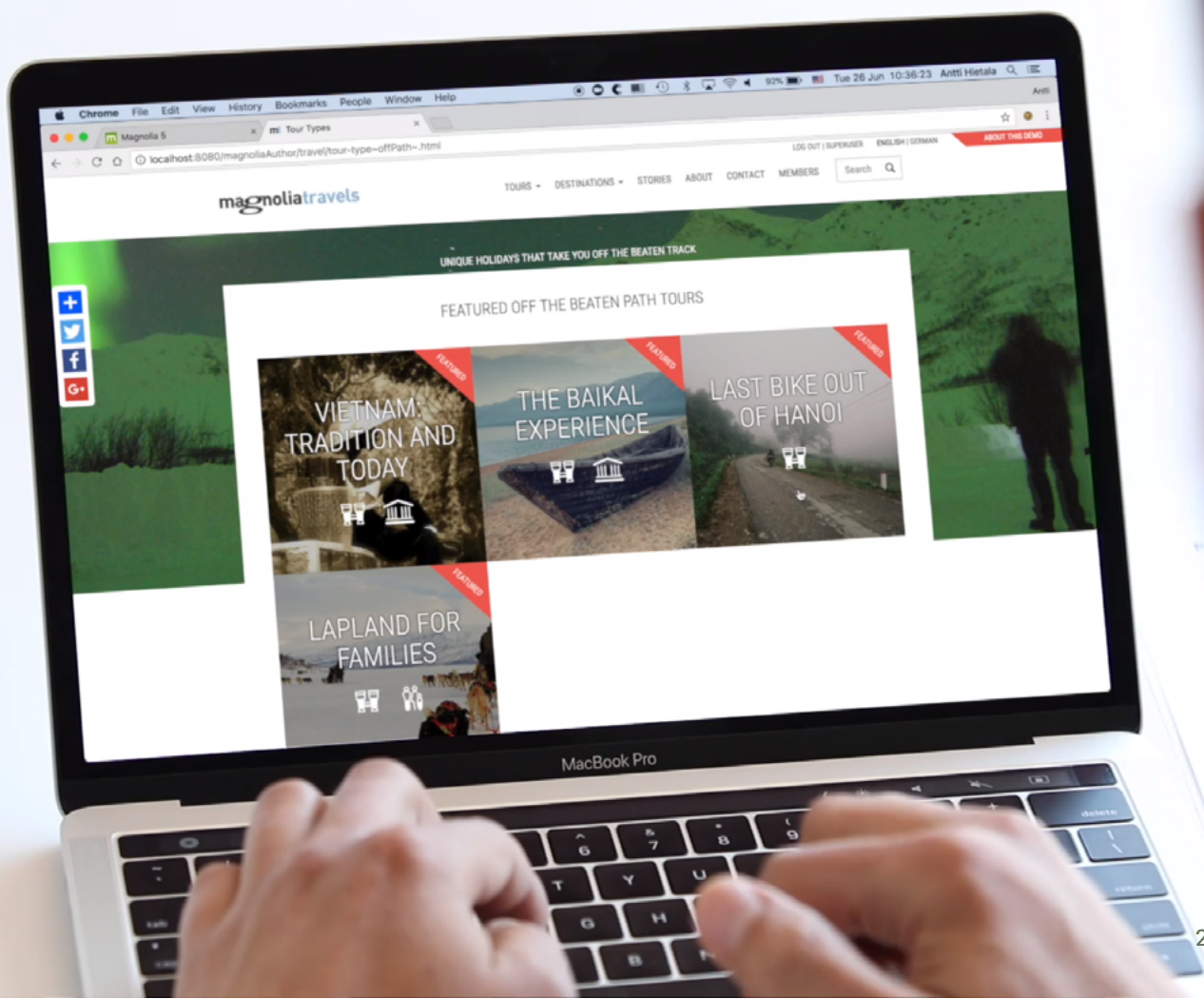
[Melia](#), a hotel company with more than 60 years of history needed to evolve its digital channels by launching a new web and mobile app. At the time, their monolithic backend application - based on Java and a proprietary CMS - was holding them back. They needed an open-source CMS that could meet some specific criteria including ease of use and simplicity (to enable all regions to use the tool), flexibility and extensibility, development speed (short time to market) and cloud friendliness.

The Melia Beyond Cloud project was brought to life thanks to Magnolia. It allowed Melia to achieve faster time to market and an improvement in scalability, performance and flexibility, to support the vertical growth of the company. Melia used [Magnolia as a content hub](#) to modernize operations, aggregate assets and content, decouple front and backend, and to ultimately deliver a cutting edge digital customer experience.

The team was trained on Magnolia in a short span of around a month and it allowed for ease of content creation, with 40+ landing pages rolled out within weeks and 10 templates + 40 components that enabled growth.



For travel companies hoping to take their digital experiences to the next level, Magnolia provides a platform for [leading-edge digital experience](#) to meet all of their content needs. Through Magnolia, companies can connect all of their content and data in one centralized place and accelerate the [personalization experience](#) for customers.





Magnolia is a leading digital experience software company. We help brands outsmart their competition through better customer experiences and faster DX projects. Get full headless flexibility and seamless workflows across best-of-breed digital experience stacks. Global leaders such as New York Times, JetBlue, Avis and Atlassian all rely on Magnolia for maximum reliability, high speed project implementation and exceptional omnichannel experiences.

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